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AUTHOR Queen, Renee
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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly examines the responses of schools and parents to writings on sexism and sex role stereotyping and considers the problems of implementing change in response to research in this area. Faulty reporting of research findings and sex biased interpretations of data are discussed. It is noted that certain curriculum areas are designated male- or female-appropriate. It is suggested that covert or overt acceptance of children by early childhood educators is determined by the match between observed and expected male or female behavior. Self-evaluation of educators in sex role awareness is proposed as a first step toward change in early childhood education, and a questionnaire is presented which focuses on personal experiences related to sex roles. A second questionnaire deals with manifestations of sexism in the daily early childhood program. The elements of a nonsexist curriculum are described. (GO)

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ROOTS OF SEX ROLE MYTHOLOGY:

ITS TRANSLATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

Renee Queen. Ed.D.
Education Director
Childcraft Education Corp

PS 008448

In comparing the amount of information available on sexism in society and sex-role stereotyping in trade and text books in 1975 with 1970, it is clear that tremendous strides have been made. It is possible to find data that support the need for human liberation but what of the translation of the research, the writing, the data into change? Has the charge been detonated and left smoke that clouds the reality image? Have the number of articles on ways to recognize and confront stereotypic messages transmitted to children and young people slackened?

Anyone who has played the role of change agent recognizes that it is easier to state the case than implement the change. Those who have heard the arguments will look for another cause, with: "Oh, I've heard that sexism lecture before." Maybe they have; maybe they have read widely; maybe they have been part of au courrant groups where they have discussed the damaging effects of sexism . . . but has it permeated the psyche so that they respond in life situations, in relationships with adults and young people in an authentic recognition of the person . . . not the gender?

Parents and teachers set the stage for sex role behaviors that become entrenched. As we find that teachers tend to teach as they were taught, and parents tend to mirror the parenting they experienced, it is vital to alert those who

work and live with children to the potential damage accruing from sexist attitudes and practices. Each time we limit children's behaviors and aspirations on the basis of gender, we commit a small violence against them. Neither boys nor girls can develop their human potential when the parameters for growth and actions are determined by decisions based on appropriateness as stereotypic males or females rather than on the basis of their interests or developmental levels.

Children arrive in day care centers, are enrolled in early child care programs with stereotyped views of sex roles. In a study by Lynn Iglitzin, of children's aspirations and fantasies, 37 per cent of the girls emphasized home and domestic life in their future life fantasies, while less than 25 per cent of the boys mentioned family or marriage. These attitudes are supported in teacher-child interactions despite the fact that most programs for early childhood will extoll the non-sexist curriculum. But a good analysis of texts, materials, play corners, playground activities and teacher responses in most centers would find that they are indeed sexist.

There are many studies done on the effects of sexism in children's books and there are many recent books that have reacted to this awareness, but it must be recognized, that in most cities, in most states, sexist texts are still

the order of the day. Comments range from: "Yes, we realize that they are not supportive of realization of self, but we have them and they are expensive," to "Well, we've read about the supposed damage to self identification, but you can't convince us that a few stories or illustrations will make much of a difference!"

But what are we really hearing?

People are threatened by sex role awareness. It will disturb the warp and the woof of their lives. It gives rise to many fears that they prefer not to confront. If the damaging effects of sexism are recognized, and if the benefit to society can be supported, the texts and trade book publishers will respond to societal demands. We find it in the GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN TEXTBOOKS prepared by The Sexism in Textbooks Committee of Women at Soott, Foresman Publishing Company. They define sexism as:

> . . . all those attitudes and actions which relegate women to a secondary and inferior status in society. Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language, or if they show women in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interests, traits, and capabilities.

Their guidelines state:

1. The achievements of women should be recognized.
2. Women and girls should be given the same respect as men and boys.
3. Abilities, traits, interests and activities should not be assigned on the basis of male or female stereo-

types.

> . . . Both men and women have much to gain from the elimination of stereotypes. Textbooks which avoid male and female stereotyping will more accurately represent reality, encourage tolerance for individual differences, and allow more freedom for children to discover and express their needs, interests and abilities.

In the pendulum swing for recognition of the actualization of the female role the male role is often not confronted, as in the first two guidelines. Their last summing up statement counterbalances this omission and must be part of the balancing of views in eradicating self ~~diminishing~~ diminishing stereotypes.

It is counter productive to confront sexism through attacks on males, their chauvanism, their academic ascendency and the state of marriage. Positive approaches that research the often subtle but insidious subconscious cultural influences in early childhood which harm boys and girls in terms of self-concepts and future interpersonal relationships would be more productive.

Parents, while awaiting the birth of the baby give much thought to the sex of the child, and the aspirations they harbour. Often, one's own aspirations are transferred to the child who will have wider opportunities through societal changes and more informed, improved parenting. There is a direct link between parental expectations and attitudes

and the development of the child. Ideals about liberal up-bringing waft away in cumulus puffs when child rearing becomes autobiographical. The same words, errors, attitudes they experienced in childhood appear in an updated version, ~~but~~ and just as lethal. In HUMAN DECENCY IS ANIMAL by Edward Wilson in The New York Times (October 12, 1975) Mr. Wilson states that Eleanor Maccoby in THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SEX DIFFERENCES found:

> "Boys consistently show more mathematical ability than girls on the average, and they are more aggressive from the first .. hours of social play at age 2 to manhood.

He editorializes that . . .

> "Even with identical education and equal access to all professions, men are more likely to continue to play a disproportionate role in political life, business and science."

This is faulty reportage since the information omitted would explicate the foundations for these findings.

Edna Mitchell in <u>YOUNG CHILDREN</u> culls from the research to point out that baby boys are handled more roughly and are encouraged to be independent and energetic explorers; girl babies are cooed to and talked to more while their passive side is reinforced. The "aggressive male" then is nurtured to develop these traits.

The other aspect is that interpretations of data ~~is~~ are often sex biased. Is it not possible that the passivity may reflect an early cognitive development in which females are tuning in to new situations?

Another reflection of the male dominance was found in the article in the October 13th New York Times article: TEXT FINDS MALES EXCEL IN ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT, a result of the examination of tests given during the last six years in connection with the NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS:

> . . . Males showed higher achievement than females in mathematics, science, social studies and citizenship. In reading and knowledge of literature the achievement levels of girls were above those of boys at the age of 9, but in the 26-35 range women trailed in both areas. (p. 32.)

They found it particularly puzzling that in the four areas in which the males dominated, the sexes showed fairly equal achievement at the age of 9.

What are the societal forces that result in these findings? One factor is that society has designated certain curriculum areas such as science and math, as male domains. Girls, as they reach adolescence, to reinforce the female image, lose interest in these subjects or feign disinterest since boy-girl relationships have more value at this growth stage.

Early childhood educators are responsible for designing curricula, arranging the learning climate, and transmitting attitudes that encourage children to explore, experiment, and pursue open ended interests without sexist value judgments. Values about appropriate sex role behaviors are subtle since they are enmeshed with self views. The first step, then is

to think through and to openly confront the values we are transmitting conterminous with which ones we want to transmit. In many instances, early childhood educators display covert or overt acceptance or rejection of girls and boys based upon how closely their personalities and behaviors approximate the ideals and stereotypes of male-female behavior. How aware are most staff members of the ways in which they do this?

The first step is to start with the "self". What behavior traits do you value? How do you react to the boys and girls in the group? How did your values develop? Answers to the following questionnaire help to focus these questions:

SEX-ROLE AWARENESS

Stereotypic behaviors derive from gender but are underscored, reinforced by societal forces. These include early parental attitudes and behaviors, relationships with siblings, impact of schooling with teacher and peer attitudes, the messages of the media and the subliminal transmission of sex role expectations that impinge upon the psyche.

The first step in moving toward change and reevaluation is confronting the self. Self attitudes and generic attitudes often are based on emotive indoctrination rather than logic and rational though processes. Often these are masked or

sublimated and they must surface as part of the process of change. To facilitate the process complete the following list. Begin by underlining the gender.

THESE ARE THE THINGS I LIKE ABOUT BEING: FEMALE MALE

THESE ARE THE THINGS I DO NOT LIKE ABOUT BEING: FEMALE MALE

Responses about self are mirrored in the present but have their antecedents in childhood and adolescence. This questionnaire will help you to focus on past experiences.

1. What were your favorite childhood pastimes?

2. With which parent did you identify? spend the most time?

3. What are your earliest recollections of boy behaviors?
girl behaviors?

4. At what times did you envy the other sex?

5. When you evidenced interest in sex atypical topics, how were they redirected? By whom?

6. In what ways were you treated differently from your brother?
   sister?

7. What behavioral changes can you describe with the advent of adolescence?

8. How did your sex role identification affect school behavior, treatment?

9. Who were the heroes, heroines of your youth?

10. In what ways was your life style predicated upon acceptable societally determined sex-role norms?

11. How were your career goals determined?

12. Describe the parental pressures upon questions 10, 11.

13. In what ways have you translated the sex role stereotypes for your children?

14. What was your favorite children's book?

15. How do you feel about the authenticity of sex-role stereotypes?

The next step would be to observe the manifestations of sexism in the daily program, through a series of questions:

1. How is the playground designed? Who plays with the climbing apparatus? The swings? The sand box?

2. If there is a structure in the playground that is usually used by the boys, do you set aside a day or part of a day for the girls to try it out?

   Do you encourage joint use of it after the girls build security with it?

3. Do you, as a female, occasionally join the active play to serve as a role model for timid girls?

4. Is there a science center and a carpentry or woodworking table easily accessible? Do you observe to see that bot sexes become involved? Do you give instruction in skills?

5. If there is only one free place at the woodworking bench and both a boy and a girl want to use it, which child is given the opportunity? How do you decide?

6. What items for dress-up do you have in the Dramatic Play corner? Are there clothing items for each sex to try on clothes of the opposite sex?

7. When field trips are organized, is thought given to

visiting women as well as men in their work areas? Do you discuss the sex of the people in varied jobs?

8. When children are asked to help are they given tasks along sex-stereotypic lines?

The attitudes, practices and values transcend curricula, texts, trade books, and toy selection. The most positive materials, when presented with blatant or subtle sexism, will be the pervasive message felt by the children. It requires on-going vigilance since early practices to which teaching persons were exposed are deeply ingrained. But the process of change begins with the conviction and the commitment to change.

The curricula for early childhood should include nurturant roles for males and females, presentation of open career goals, cooking experiences as part of social studies for both sexes, opportunities to develop science and math skills within meaningful situations, much opportunity for verbalization and story time. Both boys and girls should be encouraged to try block play, doll play, train play. There should be careful planning for dramatic play with dress up and housekeeping time.

The Women's Action Alliance developed a non-SEXIST EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM in response to concern voiced by parents and educators about the stereotypic attitudes, materials and

approaches extant in early childhood classes. The goal was to present men and women sharing nurturant roles, performing a wide diversity of jobs, and to present boys and girls in active and passive play -- sharing the same types of materials and experiences expressing a full gamut of emotions. Curriculum units that provide the framework for attainment of these goals are: The Families, Jobs People Do, Human Bodies, and Homemaking.

Centers and teaching personnel develop programs consonant with the needs, interests and abilities of the children and themselves . . . but always mindful of nurturing human potential.

Non-sexist curriculum should include a careful selection of books. Trade and text revisions have received much publicity. Many new books are attempting to rectify the dearth of non-sexist presentations but often the results are trendy books. The first criterion in children's literature is that the story must be worthy of the child's reading or listening time. The onus of responsibility for this rests with the adults who choose the books for young children. The literature has reiterated that texts and trade books have depicted girls as dim witted, passive, non-involved, male adoring, simpy creatures. Their mothers fare little better. They rarely adventure forth. If they work it is in a domestic field or one that is not terribly

creative. They are stilted, apron wearing, standing by and watching mommies.

In the readers and textbooks, as well as the trade books, boys and men as heroes are center stage. They struggle, explore, experience adventures, solve problems and use the girls to do their bidding. Daddies wear business suits and attache cases; they help to extricate girls and mommies from difficult situations, but rarely are seen in nurturant roles.

It is shocking to realize that until recently these books were never questioned, and in many geographic locations in our country they comprise the reading fare for children. Why then do we wonder that women have been denied logical rights for so long? The microcosm of sex role stereotyping in the schools and materials reflects the macroscopic view society affords its members.

Patricia Munchin, concerned with the role of educational institutions in liberating the individual lists four goals that would serve as a catalyst for liberating innovations:

1. Eradication of stereotypes
2. Provision of broad exposure to experiences, ideas and models that are free of stereotypes.
3. Education in skills for choice making, problem solving, and evaluation

4. Enhancement of self-differentiation and self-knowledge.

In facing a reevaluation of educational and parenting practices, the discomfort, confusion and sense of Alice In Wonderland when she said "Dear, dear, how queer everything is today. And yesterday things went on as usual," affects all of us who are concerned with the deleterious effects of sex role stereotyping. There is, however, no choice. Pandora's box has sprung open. None of us is quite the same and society as well as each human person will be enriched.

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